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Hansel Tells Gretel of the Witch
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—Regie Cabico—

Hansel Tells Gretel of the Witch

How easy she was to please with the stories
I told through the slats of her cage.

When we stuffed our pockets with berries
and walked like ducks to fatten father's cheeks.

Or the time I thought the birds despised us
when they nibbled our bread

and left stones in our footprints.
Then nightfall and no creek to follow

all stars extinguished in the too tall branches
and whispers of stalking owls.

Stumbling when the bats fluttered sideways
round our ears till we saw

the flicker from her half-opaque windows.
Do you recall feasting off her flower pots

of chocolate and freshly baked pretzel stems,
falling asleep deep in a spell of rice pudding?

What I remember is waking to a sweat and licorice
scent. Of course I knew we'd die.

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The twisted hair barrette and tattered sock,
soiled beneath my head,

were just reminders of what would come.
As she struck the match, I asked

that she not kill me or you. And in her eyes,
I saw those unforgiven ghosts.

Children like us, playing freeze tag in darkness,
charred and vanished.

From her final breath, I heard those
muffled screams, a sudden gust-like tug,

parentless and bewildered…
their pitch deafened by the kiln's hot hand.

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